

Abstract

Traditional ecological knowledge and culture represent assets in community-based conservation and development. These assets, however, are often perceived as challenges to conservation and development efforts by external community partners and, perhaps surprisingly, by community actors. The latter realization emerged from the work of a partnership between the Fond du Lac (FDL) Band of Lake Superior Chippewa (Ojibwe) and University of Minnesota Extension. This partnership sought to develop an Extension program to educate Band members about natural resources and improve management of Tribal natural resources by increasing overall understanding of Band members' interest in these resources.

Thirteen Moons: Forging Connections in an Ojibwe Community Through Culture, Ecology, and Management

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Context

The Reservation of the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa is located in northeastern Minnesota (Figure 1), adjacent to the city of Cloquet (pop. 11,479\*) and about 20 miles west of Duluth (pop. 84,167\*). The Reservation contains three districts: Brookston, Cloquet, and Sawyer. \*2006 Census Data

Established by the LaPointe Treaty of 1854, the Reservation is one of six associated with members of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe as outlined in Section 16 of the Act of 18 June 1934 (48 stat. 984).

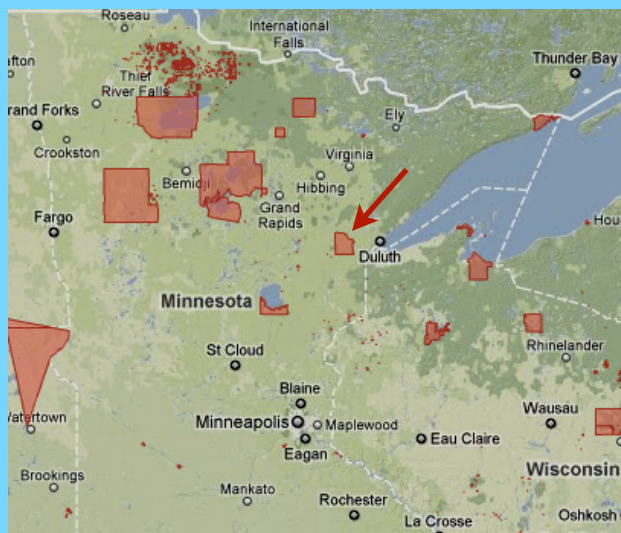


Figure 1. Native Lands in Minnesota (arrow indicating Fond du Lac Reservation).

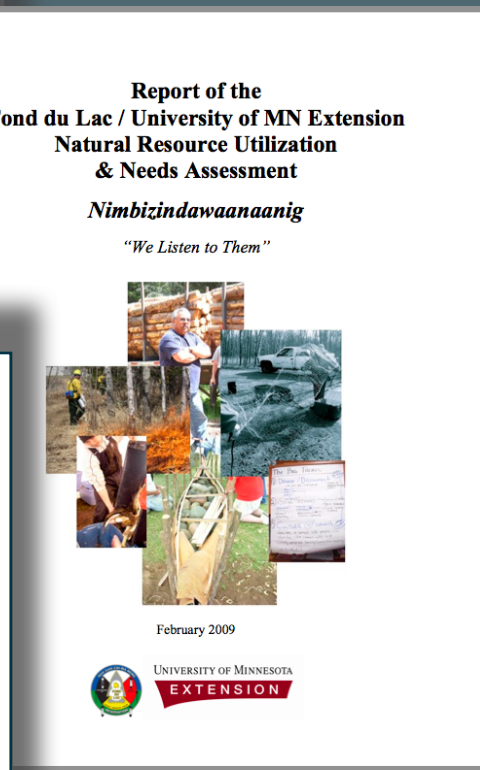
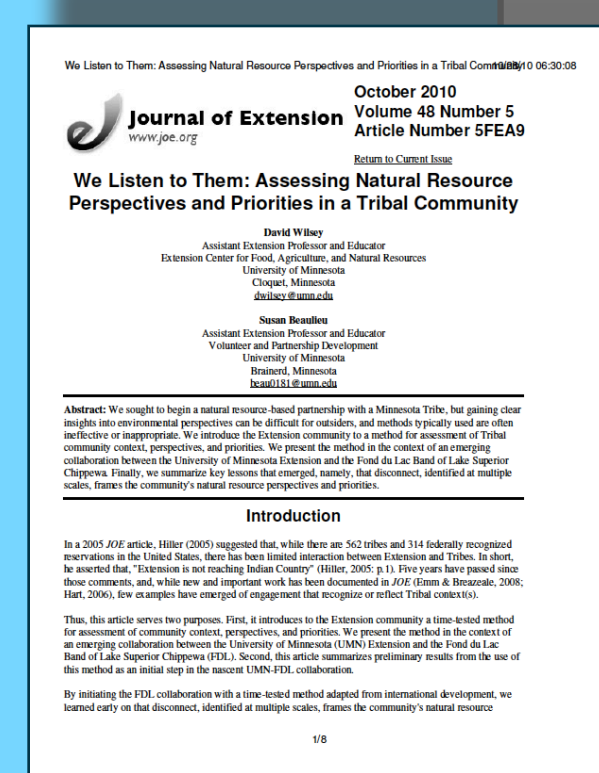
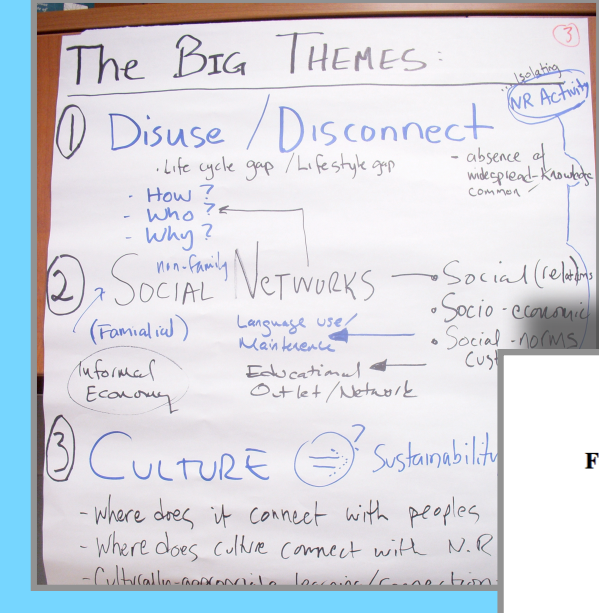
The Fond du Lac perimeter encompasses 101,426 acres, which in turn are subdivided by several forms of land tenure: county, state, and private; trust; and fee lands (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Fond du Lac Land Tenure.

Tenure status	Acres
County, state, private	71,337
FDL trust land	25,087
Allotted	16,991
Tribal / Band	8,096
FDL Fee Land	5,002
Total	101,426

This complex land tenure mosaic resulted, in large part, from the General Allotment (Dawes) Act of 1887 (25 USC 331), which was intended, "to break up reservations, destroy tribal relations, settle Indians upon their own homesteads, incorporate them into national life, and deal with them...as individual citizens" (Graves and Ebbot, 2006, p.16).

Lessons Learned



Core Themes:

- Culture
- Ecology
- Management

Goal: Connect Individuals to:

- Natural resources
- Social networks
- Ojibwe culture

On the Loss of the Ojibwe Language

"Well, maybe we are losing it," they say. "We are losing the Indian culture." But maybe not – the Indian language is still here. It is only us: we are lost and [therefore] losing everything. Indian traditions and what the Indian came to do long ago, it's still there. Like I heard on old gentleman say, "We're not losing our language, the language is losing us." – Joe Auginaush, in Living our Language (Treuer 2001: p.157)

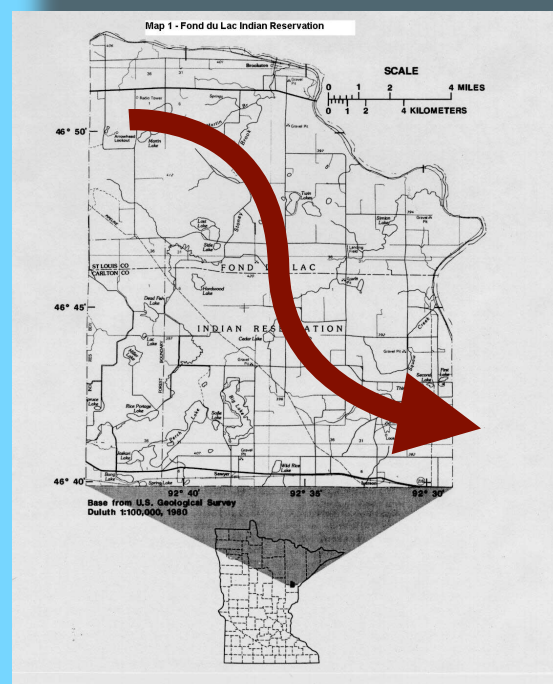
Ashi-Niswi Giizisooq (the Thirteen Moons program) emerged from the Sondeo process. The program reflects the needs and priorities of the FDL community and strives to present them in an appropriate manner - addressing culturally relevant topics using individuals respected within the community.

Initial Study

Utilizing appropriate assessment tools to gather information from community members is essential to reliable data collection and subsequent success in community work, particularly when working across cultures.

How do Fond du Lac Band members perceive and interact with natural resources?

The initial assessment study utilized the Sondeo method, a culturally appropriate assessment tool with origins in farming systems research and extension (FSR/E), to gather information about natural resource use and perspectives on the Fond du Lac Reservation in northeastern Minnesota. Building trust and relationships is critical in work with Native American communities, therefore, a participatory approach was used, with diverse teams comprised of community members and educators.



The Sondeo occurred over three days in the fall of 2008. Twenty community members were chosen to represent three perceived community groups: known natural resource users, probable natural resource users, and those with no certain connection to natural resources.

The Sondeo team was comprised of nine members: five from FDL's Resource Management Division and four from UMN Extension. Background and experience varied among team members and included forestry, natural resources management, conservation biology, education, youth development, leadership, and business.

Each day, sub-teams of two to three members conversed with community members; ideally, each team met with three individuals per day (Figure 3). Community members were asked to discuss their use of natural resources and to emphasize the factors that motivate, facilitate, and inhibit these interactions.

Beyond this introductory framing, conversations were unscripted. Community members had freedom to interpret the question, and, as a result, the emergent themes were dynamic and took form only as the process progressed. No notes were taken; team members recorded themes and discussed important details at a convenient location immediately after each conversation. At the end of the day, the nine team-members convened to share and discuss observations and summarize the themes that emerged.

On the second and third day, sub-teams were shuffled, and the process was repeated. End-of-day sessions provided shared learning among the larger team and were used to formulate and refine the outline of a report that would become a common platform for future collaboration.

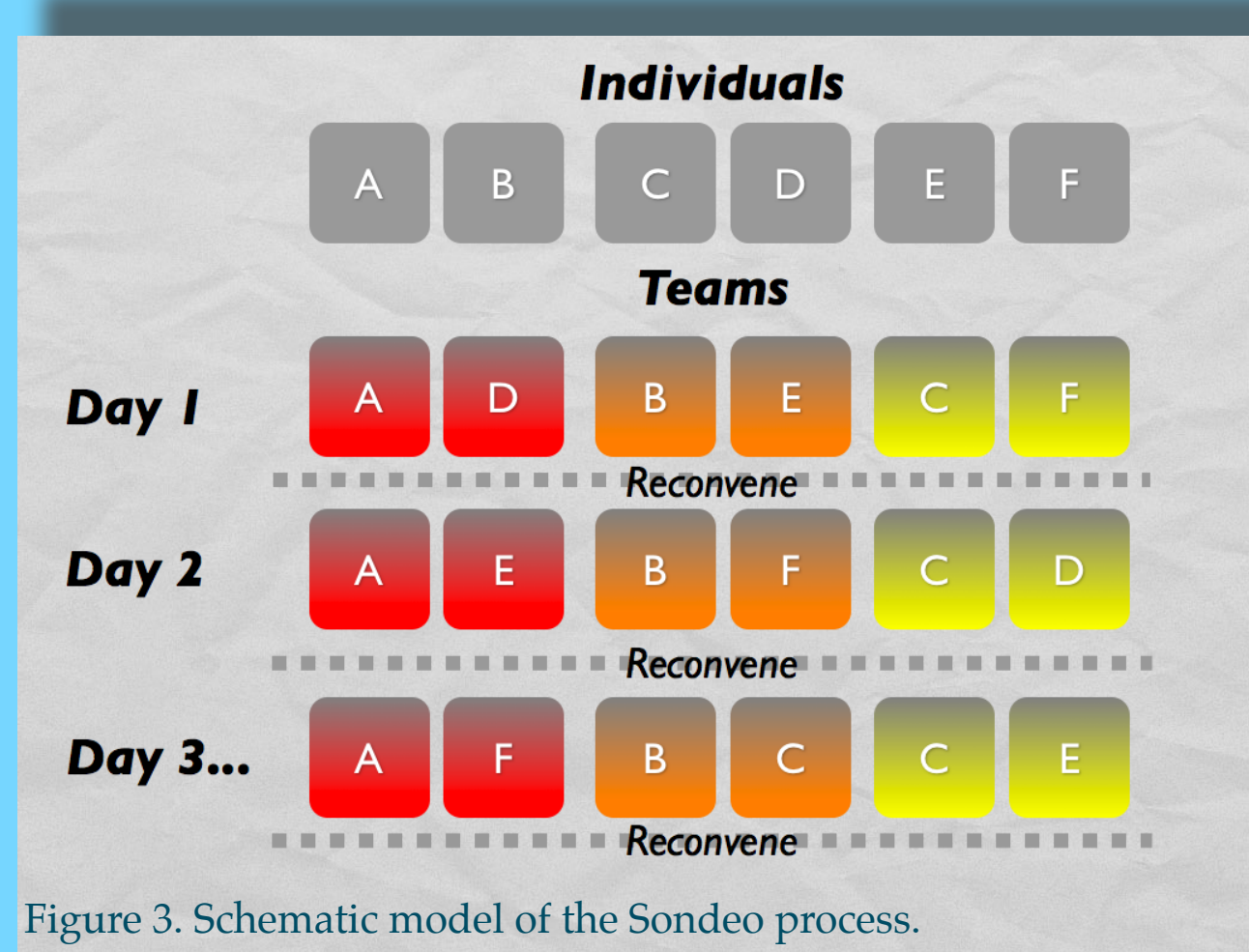


Figure 3. Schematic model of the Sondeo process.

- Diverse, interdisciplinary assessment team
- Dynamic composition of interview teams
- Rapid, efficient resource use
- Participatory

Thirteen Moons Program Framework



Key:



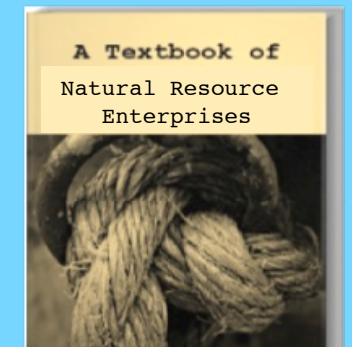
Newspaper Feature



Workshop



Seasonal Event

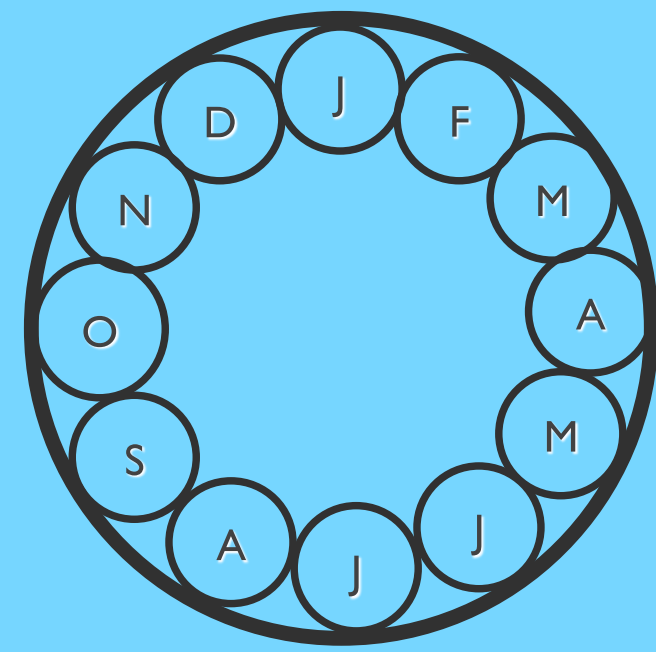


For-credit Programming

Program Outcomes

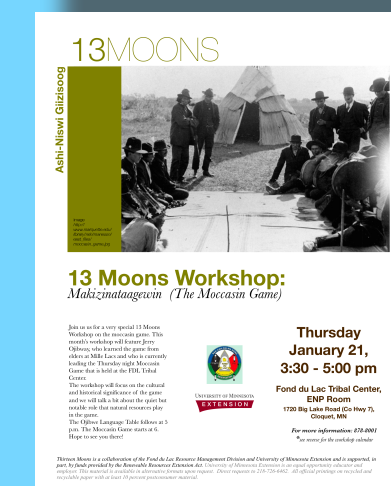
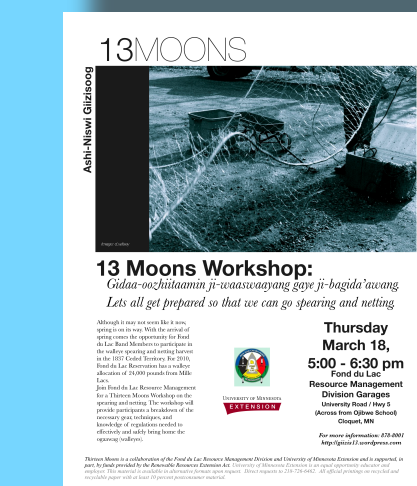
The Ojibwe calendar year follows the thirteen-moon lunar cycle. Each moon is named for a natural phenomenon – the activity of a seasonally active animal, a cultural practice or belief, or a prevalent environmental condition. The Thirteen Moons program taps into this cycle to fortify physical and cultural links between Ojibwe people and their natural environment. In the program pilot (2009/10), this was done through monthly newspaper features and workshops. Both operated on a peer-to-peer learning model and feature local, traditional knowledge.

Since the pilot, the program has expanded to incorporate research on natural resource livelihoods and mechanisms to develop natural resource livelihood strategies and enterprises. The program framework (see other box) communicates key information about the FDL community, such as livelihood formation; reservoirs of traditional knowledge; exchanges of information; and mechanisms that mark the passage of time.



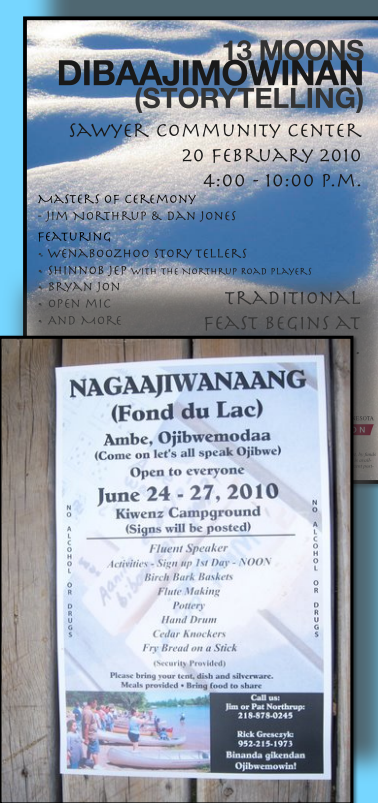
Workshops

More than twenty monthly workshops where community members share natural resource and cultural knowledge.



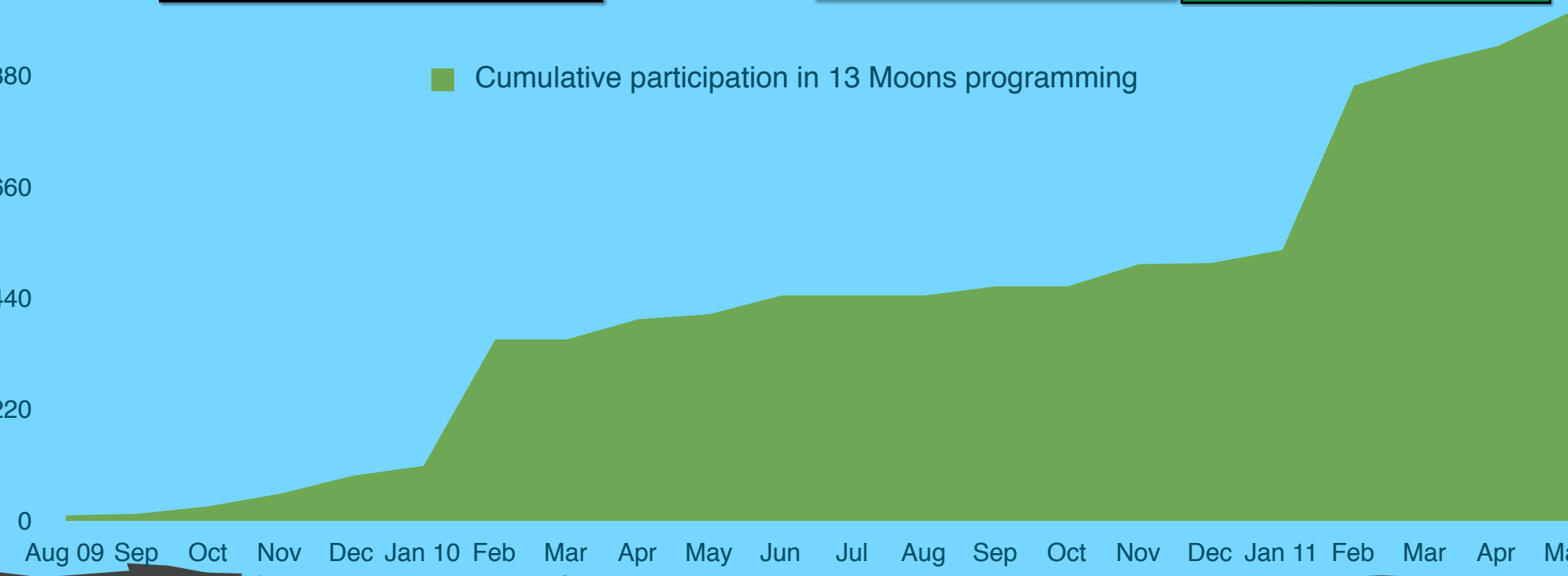
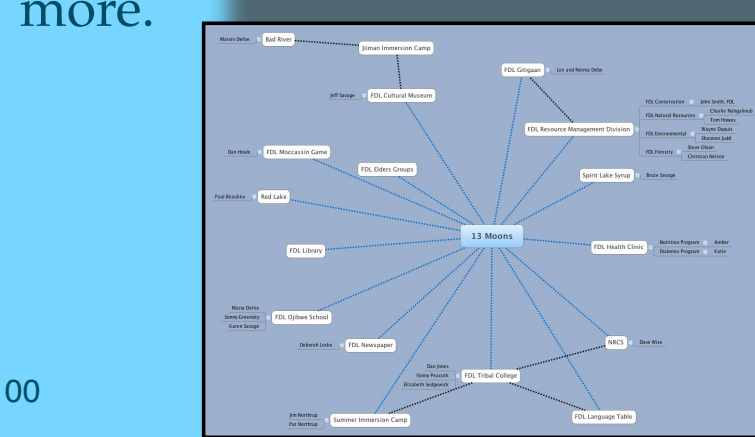
Seasonal Events

Seasonal events represent a means to bring large numbers of community members together around culturally significant occurrences. Examples include the winter Storytelling and summer Language Immersion Camp.



Network Development

Workshops, events, and newspaper features facilitate connections to natural resources and culture. They also contribute to fortification of a strong social-knowledge network. Over forty Fond du Lac community members have contributed at least one day to program development and delivery - many far more.



Newspaper Features

More than twenty monthly newspaper features focusing on culture, ecology, and natural resource management. The pages' more than fifty articles include traditional ecological knowledge, art, and stories, often authored by community members themselves.



References

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